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ABSTRACT

To reverse the exponential risk in mental illness, and to ameliorate the people-related problems of this post-industrial era, the helping professions must develop new methods of intervention which go beyond interpersonal remediation--methods which ensure that all individuals passing through the social structure systematically develop the interpersonal skills needed to live a satisfied and effective life as an individual and as a working member of the community. This article (a) defines the needed interpersonal communication skills; (b) describes the conditions under which research suggests the learning of such skills is most likely to occur and provides hypotheses as to why such learning is not yet occurring within the social structure on a systematic basis; and based on this research (c) suggests a managerial design by which counseling and student personnel staff can be assimilated into instructional ranks as "helping professors" to systematically implement interpersonal skill training as an integral part of the general, educational curriculum. (Author)

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"Helping Professors"

A New Design for Interpersonal Skill Training

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Abstract

To reverse the exponential rise in mental illness, and to ameliorate the people-related problems of this post-industrial era, the helping professions must develop new methods of intervention which go beyond interpersonal remediation--methods which ensure that all individuals passing through the social structure systematically develop the interpersonal skills needed to live a satisfied and effective life as an individual and as a working member of the community. This article (a) defines the needed interpersonal communication skills; (b) describes the conditions under which research suggests the learning of such skills is most likely to occur and provides hypotheses as to why such learning is not yet occurring within the social structure on a systematic basis; and based on this research (c) suggests a managerial design by which counseling and student personnel staff can be assimilated into instructional ranks as "helping professors" to systematically implement interpersonal skill training as an integral part of the general, education curriculum.

"Helping Professors"

A New Design for Interpersonal Skill Training

A post-industrial age has radically accelerated the scope and pace of change. The individual, once rooted in such societal mainstays as religion, extended family and neighborhood ties, and the job-for-life mentality, is, in Toffler's (1970) phase, experiencing the "death of permanence." And delinquency, crime, divorce, and drug abuse, are but a few signs tolling the individual's inability to cope with this new environment.

In the past, many of society's ills were met through traditional counseling methods in one-to-one intervention. However, today the number of those in need of help far outstrips the professionals trained to meet their needs, and "the rhetoric outlining the problems of society is sadly ahead of the materials suggesting systematic and workable remedies" (Alschuler & Ivey, 1973, p. 689). To reverse the exponential rise in mental illness and ameliorate the people-related problems of this post-industrial era, the helping professions must begin to develop methods of intervention which go beyond interpersonal remediation--methods which systematically work toward preventing individuals from ever needing remedial services.

Bordon (1955) suggests that "counseling has extremely close ties to education" since both share the "goal of contributing to the personality growth and development" of all people, and since "the ages at which formal education occurs are also those at which counseling can make its maximum contribution" (p.20). His con-

clusion that an educational setting is "one of the most important" settings for counseling is an obvious one, and one that suggests the academic institution as an ideal structure through which the helping professions can begin systematically to reach all members of society. Yet, the problem remaining is one of method. Traditional counseling has become synonymous with help for only those already experiencing difficulty while education is identified primarily with intellective services for the academically prepared.

The premises of this article are that today's societal needs mandate a wedding of the affective and intellective domains, an integration of the counseling-learning processes, and the development of a new breed of "helping professors." Specifically, the proposal is for those in the helping professions to work as educators in redefining the 3 R's to include "relating" (Cross, 1976), and in initiating interpersonal skill training programs as core components of the general educational curriculum. With "training as the preferred mode of treatment" (Carkhuff, 1971), counseling and education would take an important step toward achieving their common goal of "contributing to the personality growth and development of all people" (Bordon, 1955) by releasing in them "greater potentialities for meeting life" (Rogers, 1957b, p. 98). They would offer each individual an opportunity to learn the interpersonal skills necessary to cope with rapid and massive change, and to experience personal satisfaction and vocational success. (For research on effects of interpersonal training, see summaries in Carkhuff & Berenson, 1976). In effect, counseling

and education together would be initiating a renewed, more interpersonally effective society.

The purposes of this article are: (a) to define the interpersonal communication skills which relate to personal satisfaction and to vocational success; (b) to describe the conditions under which the research suggests the learning of such skills is most likely to occur, and to provide hypotheses as to why such learning is not yet occurring within the social structure on a systematic basis; and, based on this research (c) to suggest a managerial design by which counseling and student personnel staff can be assimilated into instructional ranks as "helping professors" to systematically implement an interpersonal communication training program a core component of the general educational curriculum.

Definition of Interpersonal Communication Skills

The study of interpersonal communication skills derives from the Rogerian (1957a) constructs of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness. These were originally posed as necessary and sufficient conditions for positive client change, although they were recognized as being representative of "any good interpersonal relationship" (Fiedler, 1962; Rogers, 1961). These helper characteristics have since been operationally defined and refined (see for examples, Akridge, Means, Milligan, & Farley, in press; Carkhuff, 1969b, 1973; Carkhuff & Berenson, 1976; Truax and Carkhuff, 1967), and while labelled differently by various authors, are generally thought to include empathy,

sincerity, self-disclosure, concreteness, confrontation, and immediacy. Scales also have been developed to measure the extent to which these helper characteristics are communicated--that is, the degree to which each construct is manifested as an interpersonal skill: empathy--the ability to paraphrase accurately the feeling and meaning of what others say; sincerity--the ability to communicate honest reactions to the thoughts and feelings of others; self-disclosure--the ability to divulge one's own thoughts, feelings and experiences; concreteness--the ability to use, and to direct others to use, specific and unambiguous language in conveying personal thoughts and feelings; confrontation--the ability to observe and describe inconsistencies in the behavior of others; immediacy--the ability to focus discussion on the here and now. Akridge, et al. (in press), for example, offer as part of their interpersonal skill training curriculum for rehabilitation workers, the following four level scale to measure the communication skill of empathy.

Level I — The helper ignores the helpee's feelings (when significant affect is communicated) while not attending, even generally to the topic the helpee is discussing (p. 13).

Level II — The helper ignores the helpee's feeling (when a significant affect is communicated) but does respond in a logical manner to the content or topic the helpee is discussing (p. 15).

Level III — The helper responds both to the affect in the helper's communication, and to the aspects of the content which are related to the helpee's affective response. The helper responds to the affect and the content in a way which appears to be interchangeable with the helpee's communication (pp. 16-17).

> Level IV (Additive Empathy)--The extent to which the helper contributes to the helpee's self-understanding by (1) accurately labeling affect communicated by the helpee that the helpee did not label or mislabel, or, (2) aiding the helpee to more specifically understand those situations or occurrences in his environment that provoked his affective responses, and (3) relating the helpee's feelings to his conceptualization of himself and his world (personalizing the helpee's experience) (p. 18).

In the past, such rating scales were primarily employed with audio and/or video recordings of counselor training sessions. They were used in teaching counselor-trainees to discriminate between the types (empathy, concreteness, etc.) of interpersonal communication skills they offered, and to recognize the degree to which each response is facilitative or helpful to the client. More recently, such training has been introduced into more non-traditional settings (see research summary in Carkhuff & Berenson, 1976), and Truax (1970) notes that the learning of these same interpersonal communication skills has been found to be:

> motivating, therapeutic, or change-inducing whether we measure delinquent behavior in delinquents, psychotic behavior in psychotics, arithmetic and reading achievement in the normal classroom, the degree of intimacy and self-disclosure in normal friendship relationships and parent-child relationships, socialization in pre-school children, neurotic behavior in neurotics, vocational progress in the physically, emotionally, or mentally handicapped, or indeed the person's sense of adequacy, satisfaction in living, or ability to live constructively across the broad areas of human relationships and human problems (p. 193).

Thus, not only have the helping professions defined and developed means to access an individual's level of interpersonal functioning, but they also have amassed evidence which demonstrates that

certain interpersonal communication skills affect the broad spectrum of living. The question remaining is how can the helping professions ensure that all individuals actually acquire these skills?

Methods of Interpersonal Skill Acquisition

Interpersonal skills can be acquired in a variety of ways, but their review of the literature has the authors suggest that learning methods fall into two categories: the indirect or "osmotic" method, and the direct or "teaching" method. Furthermore, the literature (Carkhuff, 1969a, 1969b; Pierce, Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967) indicates that irrespective of the method used in acquiring interpersonal skills, the effectiveness of the facilitator's (counselor's, teacher's) own interpersonal skills is the constant, most critical determinant of the absolute level of communication effectiveness which the student can be expected to reach. In other words, the student assimilates the type and level of interpersonal skills offered by the teacher (Pierce et al., 1967) just as the counselee's level of interpersonal functioning converges on that of his or her counselor (Pagell, Carkhuff, & Berenson, 1967), and in both instances, this movement may be in either a positive or a negative direction.

Indirect or "Osmotic" Method

The indirect or osmotic method of acquiring interpersonal skills is typified by traditional college counseling. The pur-

pose of intervention is to help the individual use his or her resources to deal more effectively with problems such as academic adjustment, sex, or drugs. However, as the student works toward resolving these conflicts, over time he or she osmotically assimilates the interpersonal skills offered by the counselor. For example, if the counselor shows empathy by accurately paraphrasing the student's statements, the student learns to use paraphrasing (and hence to express empathy) in relationships with others. Thus, while the acquisition of interpersonal skills may not be the explicit goal of the encounter, it can be the indirect result.

Regrettably, most students (people) do not choose to see a counselor, and even if they did, current economic conditions would preclude the possibility of all students having access to counseling services. In addition, even if a reversal of current economic conditions were to permit counseling staff to offer their services to all students, and even if all students were to avail themselves of these services, this still would be no guarantee of counselor-client osmosis of effective skills. For, as noted previously, the student assimilates interpersonal skills in the direction of the level offered by the counselor (Carkhuff, 1969a, 1969b; Pierce et al., 1967; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967) and counselors differ in their communication effectiveness. Indeed, cases may be cited of prominent professionals heading counselor-training programs who function at less than minimal levels (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967).

Direct or "Teaching" Method

The direct skill acquisition method is characterized by

situations in which the goals and methods, explicitly and systematically, focus on teaching interpersonal skills. Allowing for variations in setting, the method essentially includes: (a) a supportive learning environment in which the trainer offers high levels of the specific skills he or she is teaching (Thus, the direct method includes the osmotic methods); (b) lecture-discussions which introduce the target skills related to personality growth and the rating scales which measure the level of effectiveness (helpfulness) of each skill; (c) recitation drills (almost a second language approach) in which the trainee practices formulating the different types of communication skills; and (d) reinforcement exercises using rating scales in conjunction with recordings of effective trainers, the trainee in role-playing situations, and finally, the trainee in real interpersonal encounters in order to teach him or her how to discriminate and enhance the level of each interpersonal skill offered. (See, for example, the programs described by Akridge et al., in press; Carkhuff, 1969b; Truax, 1970).

Although the literature (see summaries in Carkhuff, 1969a, 1969b; Carkhuff & Berenson, 1976; Truax, Carkhuff & Douds, 1964) suggests that this didactic/experiential teaching method which focuses on eliciting and "shaping" the type and level of the trainee's interpersonal skill is most effective, it also reveals that few programs systematically employ these techniques in controlled settings to measure results. Yet the point is that interpersonal skills <u>can</u> be taught! In addition, as with the indirect

method, it is the teacher's own level of interpersonal functioning which determines to a significant degree the student's level of possible achievement (Carkhuff, 1969a, 1969b; Pierce et al., 1967; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967).

One would assume that in an educational setting interpersonal skills would be acquired, if not through counseling, then at least by the direct teaching approach. However, such is not the case. The reasons are varied and warrant brief explanation. (a) Interpersonal theory is taught under a variety of titles and in such disciplines as psychology, sociology, social psychology, and communications. In most cases, theory is taught didactically and is supplemented by games, exercises or simulations which are "processed" to illustrate the dynamics of, and problems involved in communication. However, as Carkhuff (1969a) so aptly puts it, "many people see but do not act upon what they see" (p. 241). That is, neither a person's knowledge of interpersonal constructs and theory, nor his or her ability to delimit the interpersonal skills related to personality growth, assures that the individual actually employs effective skills (Carkhuff, Collingwood, & Renz, 1969; Carkhuff, Kratochvil, & Friel, 1968). (b) There is no agreement among educators that teaching interpersonal skills constitutes an "academically respectable component of the college curriculum" (Cross, 1971). (c) The literature (see Carkhuff, 1969b) seriously questions the correlation of intellective indexes such as grade point averages and test scores with high levels of interpersonal skills. Thus, when we review

the general selection criteria for college faculty we find little guarantee of students osmotically assimilating interpersonal skills during the course of their studies.

In summary, neither counseling nor higher education provides a systematic direct or indirect method for helping students acquire interpersonal skills. And this is unfortunate indeed. For if these establishments are to keep their commitment to the personality growth and development of the "whole student," and simultaneously help reverse the exponential rise in mental illness, they can no longer afford to leave interpersonal communication training to chance. They must devise a method of intervention which ensures that each person passing through the educational structure has an opportunity to learn the interpersonal skills needed to live a satisfied and effective life as an individual and as a working member of the community.

Interpersonal Communication Training

Managerial Design

The evidence (Eysenck, 1952; Levitt, 1957) initially suggested that on the average "psychotherapy may be harmful as often as helpful, with an average effect comparable to receiving no help" (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967, p. 21). Subsequent analysis revealed that the positive results achieved by high level functioning therapists were "washed out" by the deleterious effects of low level functioning therapists, thus producing no net effect (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967). Likewise, the constructive or

deleterious effects of interpersonal skill training may be determined in large part by the trainer's initial level of functioning since the level of interpersonal skills offered by the teacher shapes the student's level of possible learning (Carkhuff, 1969a, 1969b; Pierce, et al., 1967; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967). Thus, the selection of the new breed of "helping professors" becomes key to any interpersonal skill program being able to achieve its training goals.

An examination of the structure of higher education reveals a large source of potentially highly qualified teachers whose current job function already focuses on the indirect method of imparting interpersonal skills. These are the counseling and student personnel staff. The proposed develomental or mentor role is congruous with Hobbs' vision (1958) of the "compleat counselor" and has already found its way into more recent models of counselor functions (see, for example, Morrell, Oetting, & Hurst, 1974). Yet, as Authier, Gustafson, Guerney, and Kasdorf (1975) note, few have delineated the specific teacher-like tasks the practitioner must assume, or clarified the role changes that occur when a therapist actually becomes a teacher.

The goal of this article is to inspire counseling and student personnel staff to assume a new educative role. The interpersonal skill curriculum, and the method by which it can be taught, have been described. What is needed is an overall managerial design by which those in human service deaprtments actually can become "helping professors" and incorporate an interpersonal skill pro-

gram into the basic structure of higher education.

The selection of "helping professors," like the selection of administrators or researchers, must be done on the basis of specific skills required for the job. That is, counseling and student personnel staff should be screened under ideal conditions and selected for high levels of interpersonal effectiveness using rating scales such as those outlined by Akridge et al. (in press), Carkhuff (1969b), Truax and Carkhuff (1967). Once chosen, these professionals should themselves undergo "teacher training" to maximize their effectiveness, and thus ensure the quality of their programs.

The problem, however, is that even if in addition to maintaining current caseloads counselors were immediately to begin teaching interpersonal skills, it is apparent they could reach only a small number of students with any degree of effectiveness. Thus, it is necessary to devise an economically feasible way of extending interpersonal skill training. One such approach is for counselor-teachers to employ the rating scales used in their own selection to designate students with high levels of interpersonal skills, and then teach and supervise the latter in the role of paraprofessional trainers.

In summary, the managerial design for implementing interpersonal skill training for an entire student population would involve three tiers. Tier I is comprised of "helping professors," systematically selected for their communication effectiveness,

who would select, teach, and supervise student paraprofessionals. Tier II is comprised of students, again systematically chosen for their high level of interpersonal skills, who would serve as paraprofessional trainers. Tier III comprises the student population which would receive interpersonal skill training from Tier II. Hypothetically, five "helping professors" could individually train and supervise five students as paraprofessionals; these in turn could teach interpersonal skills to at least one group of twelve students. In effect, this managerial structure would result in providing interpersonal skill training to three hundred students--a considerably larger number than can be trained through traditional one-to-one intervention--while ensuring, through systematic selection and teaching procedures, a far greater degree of control over the quality of the intervention. Administratively, the training could be offered as a course for academic credit (see, for example, Schilling 1974). In addition, continuing education programs could offer seminars either for those who would not otherwise have access to such training, or for those who have had the basic training but want to maintain and enhance their skills through short-term, reinforcement workshops.

Practical Considerations

Despite the benefits of such an interpersonal skill program, several objectives may be anticipated.

1. Time constraints. As Delworth & Aulepp (1976) point out, whenever any program sets out systematically to use paraprofessionals it demands "a good deal of professional time at the start" (p. 10). However, in light of the ever-increasing demand for human services, it seems short-sighted for counselors to cling to traditional, one-to-one methods of intervention. It would be far more productive in the long run to develop a means of minimizing the number of individuals who will ever need interpersonal, remedial services.

2. Qualifications. Their traditional roles already have provided counseling and student personnel staff with "student teaching" experience in the indirect method of helping people acquire interpersonal skills. In addition, systematic selection procedures would guarantee that only those of the highest caliber would be assimilated into instructional ranks to teach interpersonal skills. Thus, the problem for counseling and student personnel staff in instituting an interpersonal communication program, would not be one of qualifications, but rather of credibility. Success in their endeavor will depend upon their own effectiveness in demonstrating their qualifications to the administration, and in running pilot programs whose effects may be measured systematically.

3. Use of students as paraprofessionals. For professionals to admit the efficacy of paraprofessionals in any program can be

personally threatening (Carson, 1973). However, as Delworth (1974) notes, if we "believe in our own competencies, then we should be able and willing to share and to teach what we can, to learn what we don't yet know, and to join our new co-workers in building the type of mental health, educational, and other human service institutions our society so desparately needs" (p. 338). In addition, such concerns as preserving the standards of the profession and protecting the client, or in this case, the student from deleterious effects, can be dismissed by mounting evidence (See research summaries in Brown, 1974; Carkhuff, 1968, 1969b; Gartner, 1971) that paraprofessionals in a variety of human service positions function at interpersonal levels as high or higher than that of professionals (Carkhuff, 1969; Dustin, 1972). Unlike the professional selected primarily on the basis of intellective indices, paraprofessionals generally are chosen on intuitive bases alone, for precisely the skills which make them effective. Thus, since the suggestion is that only students with the highest skills be trained as paraprofessionals, and since it is precisely the teacher's own level of interpersonal effectiveness which determines the potential level of learning, then it follows that by using paraprofessionals, higher education not only would make interpersonal skill training accessible to all students in a cost-efficient way, but it also could foster the quality of such education.

Benefits of Interpersonal Skill Training in Education

Implementation of an interpersonal skill training program in higher education offers benefits both to students and human service departments.

1. Increased self-awareness and personality development. Interpersonal skill training and supervision is, as Truax, Carkhuff and Douds (1964) note of counselor-training, a type of "therapeutic process: a learning process which takes place within the context of a particular kind of interpersonal relationship which is free of threat and which facilitates self-exploration" (p. 240). Thus, the first and most obvious benefit of an interpersonal skill training program in education is that academia would offer a learning experience specifically structured to develop self-awareness (Newton, 1974). In addition, Gruver (1974) concludes from his review of the literature on college students functioning in a variety of mental health programs that such programs foster personality development: "positive changes in self-acceptance and moral judgments of a sexual-aggressive nature, greater self-understanding, increased self-confidence and enhanced identity formation" (p. 123).

2. Cross-vocational training. Today's college student will change careers several times during a working life. Thus, he or she should not be limited to job-specific training which quickly becomes obsolete, but rather should develop cross-vocational skills which are applicable to a variety of careers. DiSalvo,

Larsen, and Seiler (1974) found that students who had spent five years in their chosen fields rated communication skills a prime factor in obtaining, maintaining, and moving ahead in their chosen careers. The College Placement Council and the National Institute of Education (Bisconte & Solmon, 1976) found in a survey of 4100 graduates that less than half used their major subject in work, but that almost all needed additional training in communication and human relations. Cross-vocational training is at the heart of the proposed curriculum.

3. Improvement of support services. Upon completion of training, students with measurably high levels of interpersonal skills could be selected by human service departments to fill academic advisement and adjustment, freshman orientation, and residence hall positions. Not only are these positions acceptable to Counseling Center Directors (Crane, Anderson & Kirchner, 1971), but also they are the ones in which the paraprofessionals have been regarded as effective (Zunker & Brown, 1966). In addition, systematic selection procedures would minimize the time and cost professionals give to these programs since the interpersonal skill training, which was previously a part of each program, could be eliminated. Training for such positions now would focus solely on information orientation to the job functions.

4. Expansion of human service operations. Institutionalized interpersonal skill training would result in a pool of highly skilled personnel enabling human service departments to expand

and even improve their offerings. Upon completion of training, students with measurably high levels of interpersonal skills could be selected to work under the supervision of a professional. They could teach interpersonal skills as part of the previously described core program and serve as remedial tutors. The notion that paraprofessional students could also do counseling will meet with resistance. While the review of the literature by Zimpfer (1974b), and the surveys of Brown and Zunker (1966) and Zimpfer (1974a), reported counselors in enthusiastic support of paraprofessionals, the surveys of Crane, Anderson and Kirchner (1971), and Jones and Cox (1970), found Counseling Center Directors do not perceive counseling as an appropriate function for support personnel. In addition, the Task Force on Paraprofessionals in the Counseling Center (1971) found that paraprofessionals are employed only in those areas which Directors perceive as appropriate. Yet, when Truax and Lister (1970) compared case management, they found that a paraprofessional working alone under the supervision of a professional resulted in greater client improvement than when the counselor worked alone or was assisted by a paraprofessional. Some will seek to dismiss such evidence on methodological grounds (McArthur, 1970), but as Brown (1974) insists, we cannot deny the success of paraprofessionals when we view each finding in light of the literature which has been amassed over the past fifteen years.

Conclusion

We know a core of interpersonal skills which affect the broad spectrum of living. We know the methods which have proven most effective in helping people acquire these skills. And we now know a managerial design by which "helping professors" can ensure that each person passing through the educational system systematically will develop the interpersonal skills necessary to live a satisfied and effective life as an individual and as a working member of the community. The future is up to you. For theoretically, if interpersonal skill training were institutionalized in schools across the country, there should come a time when the training itself would be obsolete. If the young are trained to be interpersonally effective, and if individuals can develop interpersonal skills by modeling themselves on those who already have such skills, then eventually effective interpersonal skills would be passed on through the social structure from parents to children. The proposed curriculum is one way in which counseling and student personnel staff can begin to initiate a self-renewing, more interpersonally effective society.

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